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Allan H. MacLaine. Robert Fergusson (Twayne's English Authors Series). New York. Twayne Publishers, Inc. 1965. 178 pp. \$3.50.

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(1839) as Cunningham's forgeries—a valuable by-product of his work on the Cunningham transcript—though the 1959 editors of the *Merry Muses* regard them as Burns's expurgations. (It is more than half a century since Henley and Henderson wrote them off (Centenary Edition, iv. 76) as 'mere excerpts from *The Merry Muses* . . . beggared of piquancy and significance.')

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Allan H. MacLaine. *Robert Fergusson* (Twayne's English Authors Series). New York. Twayne Publishers, Inc. 1965. 178 pp. \$3.50.

Despite Fergusson's perennial popularity, it is not surprising that this is the first full length critical work on his poetry. For until our own generation, thorough critics have not dealt at all with Scots poetry. The tradition itself has gone unexamined. Perhaps only in this century has Burns been treated critically and appreciated as a significant poet whose work is worthy of real literary study.

Since literature always exists as part of a tradition and since any wide-ranging historical studies of Scottish literature have been, to date, inadequate, the reader must admire Dr. MacLaine's insightful comprehension of the whole. Not only does he give Fergusson his place between the past and future, but he relates, with profundity, the Scottish to the English tradition, extremely important in a study of the poet. At the same time he concentrates on the intrinsic values of the poetry at hand, analyzing appreciatively poem after poem, much in the manner of Daiches on Burns. This method gives the volume value as a reference work, though Dr. MacLaine never boils over with too many explicative details of a trivial nature; he is always able to generalize in such a way that the reader is aware of the comparative values of any single poem. Explications are generous, substantially treating any single poem, the ten pages given to "Auld Reikie" serving as an example.

The author depicts a poet whose own knowledge of the Scottish tradition was not at all superficial. For instance, he discusses at length

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Fergusson's use of the Christis Kirk stanza in "Hallow-fair" and "Leith Races" and analyzes thoroughly his contribution to the development of Standard Habby. (But surely this stanza had been used for non-elegiac purposes before Fergusson.)

This discovery of the past by Fergusson is significant. Not only did the tradition become a fine creative instrument at the pen of Edinburgh's laureate, but all the skills Fergusson developed came to live again in Burns. That is Fergusson's misfortune in terms of his personal fame. He really was Burns' "elder brother in the Muse." And in this book too, unfortunately, the great shadow of Burns still darkens somewhat Fergusson's considerable genius, which Dr. MacLaine shows beyond a doubt could stand in its own light.

Despite occasional biographical significance in the inferior English work, the author treats only the Scots poems. The English poems might have been treated in a minimum of space both as a deeper insight into the poet's mind and as an illustration of that mysterious dichotomy in the creative Scots mind, Burns too having writhed occasionally in the unfamiliar fetters of a Neo-classic line.

For quoted passages Dr. MacLaine provides lineside glosses, most necessary since Fergusson's language, more purely dialectal than that of Burns and eclectic in the sense that he used various dialects, is often obscure. While Burns wrote for the British, Fergusson really wrote for his compatriots.

The author's overall plan is to show a progressive development, refinement, and sensitivity in Fergusson's artistry. He is led occasionally to extremism: e.g., that the poem "To my Auld Breeks" with its touching personal references was a "precedent for [Burns'] many self-revealing, highly personalized poems." Burns was just Burns. In the progressive pattern the poem "Auld Reikie" is given critical appreciation as a product of the poet's most mature period; but internal evidence suggests the poem was written in 1770, not 1773. The lines,

The spacious *Brig* neglected lies,
Tho' plagu'd wi' pamphlets, dunn'd wi' cries

were probably written when the North Bridge was collapsed. It fell in 1769 and was restored in 1770.

Though biography is not Dr. MacLaine's purpose, some errors not at all harmful to his aims do creep in: Robert was the *third* son of William Fergusson; William had not been apprenticed to a merchant in Aberdeen; on the basis of his own records, we can discern that Fergusson started work in the Commissary Office in September 1770, not

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1769; the volume of his postdated *Poems* was published and on sale in 1772; there is no doubt whatsoever that he did not die of syphilis, which destroys a man only after a considerable number of years. As to Burns' discovery of Fergusson, he himself wrote that the date was before March 1782. Matthew McDiarmid (*The Poems of Robert Fergusson*, STS) cast doubt on this in part because he thought the 1782 edition which Burns owned had not been published by that time. It was actually published (postdated) in August 1781. Dr. MacLaine is right in asserting that the actual influence of Fergusson does not appear until later. Twayne has seen fit to print on the jacket the portrait of least authenticity.

For the sake of accuracy these errors should be mentioned, though they in no way detract from the book. Dr. MacLaine is always interesting, for his style is lucid and concrete. There is no hazy impressionism about his critical reasoning and conclusions, and his enthusiasm for Fergusson endures beyond the end. We should await with eagerness his forthcoming books on Burns and Ramsay.

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Eileen Mackenzie. *The Findlater Sisters: Literature & Friendship*. London. John Murray. 1964. xiii, 150 pp. 21/-.

The minor writers of a country have an interest quite distinct from the kind of interest evoked by its major writers. All the world knows the great writers, however strongly national, or even local, they may be. The minor writers are known perhaps to only a few devoted enthusiasts who may be inclined to harm their case by idolatry and excessive adulation, yet these minor writers frequently possess quite considerable talent and they often display interesting aspects of the national genius.

In this study of the Findlater sisters — Mary (1865-1963) and Jane Helen (1866-1946) — Eileen Mackenzie maintains a judicious balance, recognizing and assessing the quality of their work and the charm and